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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1502
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 4268
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2080
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1945
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 2516
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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SUBJECT: EU/TURKMENISTAN: SEEKING TO ENGAGE DESPITE HUMAN
RIGHTS SCRUPLES

11. (SBU) During a September 3 courtesy call, the European Commission's Regional Political Affairs Adviser for Central Asian Countries, Alessandro Liamine, told the A/DCM that the European Commission is determined to move its relationship with Turkmenistan ahead. Although a number of EU countries are withholding consensus on "normalizing" the relationship because of Turkmenistan's poor human rights record in the past, the Commission wants to do what it can to begin building trust. With that in mind, his Almaty-based office, responsible for regional initiatives, has been tasked with pulling together a cooperation program focused on helping Turkmenistan to manage crises. For now, Liamine wants to focus on domestic crises -- natural, man-made and stability-related. Once the relationship is more firmly established, the EC may attempt to deal with larger regional issues, although he acknowledged that the newly established UN Center for Preventive Diplomacy may well have filled that gap by the time the EC is ready to move forward with these wider-focus programs. During this first trip to Ashgabat, Liamine was meeting only with members of the international donor community to get a sense of what is already being done and what could usefully be done. Once his office has come up with concrete proposals, he will return to sell the program to the government.

12. (SBU) COMMENT: Although EU and EC officials have acknowledged to us that the decision not to offer Turkmenistan a "normal" relationship is a nuisance, most officials also seem to recognize that if they do not begin engagement now, they may lose out on some important opportunities to build goodwill and make a difference. Most here agree that Turkmenistan is woefully unprepared to handle almost any emergency, and this is likely one reason that Turkmenistan's emergency management bodies are embracing U.S. offers under the IMET and Nevada National Guard programs to assist. Nonetheless, this is a huge area of potential cooperation, and we see more than enough room for others to become involved. END COMMENT.
CURRAN